

King, JFK Probers Told to Justify Costs

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Washington — House Administration Committee chairman Frank Thompson (D-Trenton) wants the new Select Committee on Assassinations to "justify every nickel" of its proposed \$6.5 million budget for 1977, and he has already turned down a request for the use of some electronic surveillance devices.

Thompson's committee must give prior approval to the assassination unit's budget before it is voted on by the full House of Representatives. Richard A. Sprague, the Philadelphia lawyer who is the chief counsel for the select committee, said he needs a staff of 170 persons to conduct an investigation of the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr.

Thompson received a letter on Nov. 30 from Rep. Thomas Downing (D-Va.) requesting authorization to purchase the listening devices, which could be attached to clothing & used

to transmit conversations to another location.

"I'm unalterably opposed to such practices," Thompson said yesterday. "I feel very strongly about it. I would never authorize investigators to go around with tape recorders in their vest pockets."

Downing, who is chairman of the committee, said he was not very concerned about Thompson's rejection. "I really didn't think that they (the transmitters) would be needed," he said.

Sprague was not available for comment yesterday. The assassinations committee is to release its report for 1976 tomorrow morning.

Sprague has gained a nationwide reputation as a successful special prosecutor in the Philadelphia area. He was formerly first assistant district attorney in the city. "If he (Sprague) is a really good prosecutor he doesn't have to resort to electronic surveillance or transgress anyone's

vestigation," said Thompson.

Thompson, who described himself as a fiscal conservative and a "civil libertarian," said he is not going to let Sprague "run amok" with the assassination probe. "Let him justify every nickle of it, and every nickel of it I'll support," he said. "I'm not about to give carte blanche."

The \$6.5 million funding request took many congressmen by surprise, including Downing himself. "I was thinking in terms of \$2-3 million; I just wasn't expecting that (the \$6.5 million figure)," he remarked. However, Downing said Sprague convinced everyone on the committee to support the appropriations proposal.

Downing wouldn't predict how the request would fare before the full House, adding, "The people who are basically opposed to the idea anyway will say \$150 is too much."

Sprague started his campaign to secure the funding earlier this month by making an unusual appearance before

the caucus of House Democrats. Thompson called the move "completely unprecedented" and indicated he would not be pressured into a decision "by a lot of newspaper releases and a speech on the House floor."

The budget proposal may not be acted on until mid-February, according to Thompson. He said his committee must fund all of the other House bodies when the new Congress goes into session in January and the requests will go to a full House vote. The House Administration committee on accounts will make its own recommendation and then forward it to the full committee.

Thompson's opposition to the taping devices, valued at \$2,200 each, makes it unlikely that the other members of his committee will vote to authorize them. Sprague is also asking for some \$30,000 worth of additional investigative equipment, including detectors, voice stress evaluators & tape recorders.